Suffering Transformed into New Life

Easter Sunday felt strange to me this year. Outside in the garden the sun shone, the birds were singing and the spring flowers were plentiful. Surrounded by the symbols of new life that we associate with Easter, the day did feel joyful and many shared a ‘Happy Easter’ greeting via social media. However, as I walked in from the garden and heard of the number of deaths from Covid-19, I admit that I found it very difficult to think of the joy of Easter Sunday without recalling the suffering of Good Friday. Jesus’ resurrection to new life followed his suffering and death on the cross and this year, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, I found myself unable to send the conventional jubilant Easter greeting. Without me explaining, we ate hot cross buns *and* chocolate eggs in the vicarage on Easter Sunday and no one asked why.

In our news coverage of Coronavirus we have seen both immense suffering and the heroic, self-sacrificial caring for others. Those who have had direct experience of this will know this all the more. In one sense these appear as two opposites, ‘bad’ and ‘good’, and yet these have co-existed together from the beginning of the outbreak, as tightly bound together as the ‘sad’ and ‘happy’ events of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the Christian accounts of the first Easter. This is why I couldn’t bring myself to send the conventional jubilant message on Easter Sunday this year but was grateful to those that felt they could.

The image that I had in my mind on Easter Day is one that I can now share, as in the tradition of the church this account is shared on the 2nd Sunday of the Easter Season (which lasts for 50 days). It was the occasion of Jesus presenting himself alive to his disciples who were in ‘lockdown’ in a house for safety. His message “Peace be with you.” was recognised immediately by them. What stood out in my memory was the fact that his risen body had scars from the wounds of his crucifixion evident on his hands, his feet, and his side. The joy of his bodily resurrection did not deny the suffering that he had experienced but showed that he had emerged from suffering transformed to experience new life. This inspired his first disciples and generations since to trust in Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, ‘God with us’, experiencing new life through the inspiration of his self-sacrificing love for humanity.

I pray that the Christ-like serving of each other that we see across our villages, towns, and our nation at this time will sustain us in hope through the challenges and suffering; to emerge with priorities transformed and consistently better able to cooperate with and care for each other.

With my continued prayers for the safety and well-being of all,

Jayne

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